



The Future of The Antigonish Movement

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THE ANTIGONISH MOVEMENT IS ADULT EDUCATION

In forecasting its future, we must necessarily go into the content of Adult Education. We might ask ourselves, "What is its subject matter? What is its scope? Where is it most needed?"

We all now believe that Education is co-extensive and co-terminus with life. There are no zones of human activity closed to human mind. In whatever sphere of human experience, wherein there are unrequited needs of man, there is the ministry of the mind and the spirit. Adult Education is not limited to the multiplication table. It takes into account man as a spiritual being, it seeks to establish just relationships as between man and man in the economic order. It examines the mutual problems and consumer.

We are not so much concerned with setting the yard limits of Adult Education as we are with throwing the switches which will give the average man unobstructed passage to wider field of knowledge, self-help and security, and let him find his own way.

BEWARE OF INSTITUTIONALIZING

If there is one warning, it is this --beware of institutionalizing. I can illustrate best what I mean by relating a story which they tell in New York about Lincoln Steffens. It is told of Mr. Steffens that he was one day walking down Broadway with the devil. They saw an ideal floating in the air. A passerby seized the ideal and put it in his pocket. Mr. Steffens said to the devil, "That is going to be bad for the business, isn't it?"

"Oh, no," said the devil, "I'll teach him to organize it."

When a thing becomes over-institutionalized, it tends to become sterile. It seems to me that is what has happened to formal education. We might well ask ourselves if something similar has not happened to those religious people who sit back, at times like these, when so many millions have become propertyless, stricken with fear of economic insecurity, homeless waifs of a hit-and-miss industrialism.

It is this kind of thing enables severe critics Christianity to say that religion is the opiate of the people.

It is not Christianity that is the opiate of the people, it is the inert state of Christians that furnishes some semblance of truth to this libel. *It is fossilized education that is the opiate of the people.* It keeps them from getting the truth about the condition that they are in. Says Douglas Gerrold in his "Future of Freedom": "On hearing the adoption in all civilized countries of compulsory education, the inhabitant of Mars would assume a wide diffusion of culture, the exaction by an educated electorate of new standards of logic from publicists, and of new standards of enlightenment from statesmen....He would feel assured that means at last exist for bringing home to all classes, by the most direct and effective of methods, the facts of every problem, means for breaking up class or sectional or national prejudice and for combating and conquering ignorance."

In every one of these anticipations, the inhabitant of Mars would be wholly wrong. The problems of ignorance, of irreligion, of class prejudice, of national, racial and class hatred which were visible on the surface of things, a hundred years ago, have today struck roots so deep and so powerful that they threaten the very foundations of our civilization.....Meanwhile, envy, born of ignorance and fed by material greed, threatens to destroy society from within.

ADULT EDUCATION FOR EVERYONE

Adult education is not for illiterates alone nor is it to pap-feed social climbers with appreciation of Shakespeare and Beethoven. It should be designed for the best brains we have, to wrestle with the worst problems we have -- want and frustrated lives literally crushed under a heritage of plenty which these people cannot get their hands on.

We believe also in the mute, inglorious Miltons. It is the duty of Adult Education to make the mute vocal, and to make the blind see. But education that is conscious of its mission must be free from the patronizing air, from talking down as from some lofty oracle, from inventing decoys and sops, handy palliatives and barricades, to fence injustice off from justice.

Not only must it be prepared to accept truth where it finds it, it must also be prepared to accept talent where it finds it. Our experience in the Antigonish Movement is that there is more real Adult Education at the pit-heads, down in the mines, out among the fishermen's shacks, along the wharves, and wherever the farmers gather to sit and talk in the evenings, than you can get from one hundred thousand dollars worth of fossilized formal courses. It springs from the hearts and pains of the people. It is spontaneous -- call it the cracker-barrel type, if you will -- I vote for the cracker-barrel. The former doesn't fill any empty pantry, it doesn't bring milk and food and health back to babies blighted with malnutrition already in their toddling years. We want ideas with marrow in them.

It may be said by oracles of the school of education -- those peddlers of dope and drugs in the realm of ideas -- that education, such as I am talking about, smacks of propaganda. Well, what of it? Would you accuse a man, looking for a place to sleep for the night, of propaganda? If so, we are propagandists. If education is not the propaganda of truth, then it is not education. And we might ask ourselves, "What is education anyhow? Is it propaganda away from the truth? Then why cumberth it the ground?"

Adult Education is the knowledge that ministers to self-development, character and social intelligence. I see no reason why, using your brains to bring knowledge, that is, power, to bear upon something that will put necessities on your bare table, clothes on your naked back and covering over your head, should be called propaganda.

It is technically impossible anyhow to keep people in ignorance today concerning economic affairs. it has become technically impossible -- quite apart from the ethics of the thing -- to keep people in the dark about who gets the lion's share of the wealth that issues out of the economic processes. There are too many ways of getting "wised up".

LIBRARIES PROMOTE ADULT EDUCATION

The chief instrument for promoting Adult Education will be the well stocked Regional Library, the people's university of the future, supported as our public schools are.

It will not emphasize alone books, but interpreters of books and trained guides in the choice of books and subjects, suitable to the needs and tastes of the reader.

The trained librarian of the Regional Library ought to be, first and foremost, an Adult Educator. It is one thing to be active in library service and it may be quite another thing to be a promoter of Adult Education. Adult Education works towards the development of the community. A library might unwittingly become a hindrance rather than a help in the spread of genuine education -- Adult or otherwise -- and become like so much formal education in the past, the opiate of the people.

The American Association of Adult Education feels that one of its chief duties today is to set men "free from the utter drabness of unfulfilled lives." To do this, our methods must be flexible and informal. Faith in the educatability of the average man is one of the chief underlying ideas of the Antigonish Movement.

Today, we tremble before the spectre of war. Enthusiasm can be whipped up by militarists. Why not the same enthusiasm for feeling and clothing people as there is for killing them? We are not against propaganda on these occasions, are we? If we co-operate for death, we ought to be able to co-operate for life. People in times of crisis have to be shocked into knowing the true nature of things. People have, for too long, been fooled into hiding under a bushel, largely by propaganda, for laissez-faire and in the interests of greed.

RELIGION, EDUCATION AND ECONOMICS

In regard to the future, I am not so concerned with setting the exact limits of the Antigonish Movement. This education is not confined to economic things alone. For 150 years, we have been listening to the propaganda -- keep religion out of business. The fact is that laissez-faire industrialism is reeking with religion -- the cult of fatalism that expects things of themselves to come out from around the corner. And the peculiar thing about this negative religion is that it follows the machine all over the world and has become the week-day religion of the people, no matter at what altar they may worship on Sunday. It was, and it is, a cult most convenient to the upholders of laissez-faire. Interference by governments or organizations of any kind were decried as taboo on the ground of being artificial, by the liberalistic junta, which in the name of liberty, found license to rob and ruthlessly exploit. The Sermon on the Mount was fine for Sundays but had no place on weekdays.

When we suggest the various possible fields of Adult Education, this, to my mind, is one of them that can be explored by the multitude whose oxen have been gored for the last 150 years. To me this seems

a very proper subject for Adult Education. I care not so much how it is put across, or who does it. The main thing is, that it will be done. We are not bringing in sectarianism. The program of the Antigonish Movement is broad enough and big enough to take in right thinking men of all creeds who are awakened to the gravity of social conditions today, and who have felt the desire to do something. Such men belong to many divisions of the Christian religion, and include many who do not profess to be Christians. After all, what we are all looking for, is a world where men can live.

It may be, then, the unique destiny of the Adult Education Movement to bridge the breach between religion and economic -- as modern Research is bridging the breach between religion and science.

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